

SNORKELING APPARATUS

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BACKGROUND

A snorkeling apparatus comprising swimming goggles or a mask in combination with a snorkel is used to allow swimmers to swim continuously face down in the water and provide eye protection from water.

Devices directed to eye protection and/or snorkels are described in U.S. Patent Nos. 3,721,236; 4,286,340; 5,199,421; 5,606,967; 5,915,541; 6,276,362; 6,302,102; 6,309,270; 6,318,363; and 6,405,384. Each of these devices has one or more shortcomings. Among these shortcomings are excessive hydrodynamic drag while swimming and difficulty in clearing the goggles or mask when water leaks in.

SUMMARY

A snorkeling apparatus according to the present invention overcomes shortcomings of prior art devices. The apparatus comprises an eye cover device and a snorkel, the snorkel including hollow bore tubular sections that provide a breathing tube. The eye cover device comprises at least one lense, a frame for holding the lense, and a retainer such as a strap for retaining the device in a watertight relationship on a user's face surface surrounding the eyes of the user.

The frame has a central portion that is to be centrally positioned on the face of the user. In a preferred version of the invention, the snorkel is rigidly connected to the central portion of the frame. The snorkel preferably has a forward projecting section which is located below the water line when the snorkeling apparatus is used, for the purpose of reducing hydrodynamic drag.

In one version of the invention a retainer strap is adapted to loop over the top of the user's head and engage a distal portion of the snorkel to hold it in place, further reducing hydrodynamic drag.

The snorkel typically includes a mouthpiece having an orifice in fluid communication with the breathing tube. In a preferred version of the invention, a purge tube connects the mouthpiece to the eye cover device for purging water from under the lense of the eye cover device. To use the purge tube, a user places his or her tongue over a mouthpiece orifice in communication with the breathing tube, and blows out. The air passes through the purge tube into the space between the user's eyes and the goggles/mask, thereby displacing water therein.

In a scuba version of the invention, the snorkel can have a lower mouthpiece portion and an upper portion that can be moved away from the user's mouth to allow use of a scuba diving regulator.

Thus, a device is provided that allows snorkeling with reduced hydrodynamic drag, and allows purging of water in a hands-free manner without having to remove the mask or goggles.

DRAWINGS

These and other features, aspects, and advantages of the present invention will become better understood from the following description, appended claims and accompanying drawings where:

Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a first type of snorkeling apparatus according to the present invention;

Fig. 2 shows the snorkeling apparatus of Fig. 1 being worn by a swimmer;

Fig. 3 is a rear elevation view, partly in section, of the lower portion of the snorkel of the apparatus of Fig. 1;

Fig. 4 is a partial sectional view of the apparatus taken on line 4-4 in Fig. 3;

Fig. 5 is a rear perspective view of the apparatus of Fig. 1, partially broken away;

Fig. 6 is a perspective view of the apparatus of Fig. 1, partially broken away;

Fig. 7 schematically shows a swimmer swimming with a second type of snorkeling apparatus according to the present invention;

Fig. 8 is a side elevation view of a third type of snorkeling apparatus according to the present invention useful for scuba diving;

Fig. 9 is a side elevation view of the apparatus of Fig. 8 partly broken away;

Fig. 10 is a partial sectional view showing details of section 10 in Fig. 9; and

Fig. 11 is a schematic view showing details of a portion of the apparatus of Fig. 8.

DESCRIPTION

A snorkeling apparatus **10** embodying features of the present invention as shown in Figs. 1-7. Although the snorkeling apparatus **10** includes many features of the present invention, it should be appreciated that only some of the features need to be used. Advantages of the present invention are obtainable with less than all of the described features.

The snorkeling apparatus **10** comprises an eye cover device **12** and a snorkel **14**. The eye cover device **12** can be either a mask or goggles, the difference being the number of transparent lenses, a mask having a single large lense and goggles having individual lenses, one for each eye.

The eye cover device **12** has a rigid frame **16** holding substantially transparent eye covers **18** and **19** with a central portion **20** between the eye covers **18** and **19**. The eye cover device **12** can optionally include a portion that covers a user's nose as is common in scuba masks. The frame **16** is made of a substantially rigid material such as synthetic thermoplastic

such as glassed filled nylon and can be formed by injection molding. The lenses 18 and 19 can be held in the frame 16 by placement in a recess (not shown).

At the inner side of the frame 16 there is provided a sealing assembly 21 which includes a seal member 22 which in use is applied in water right relationship against the surface of a user's face. The seal member 22 has a generally curvilinear configuration corresponding to that of the lenses 18 and 19 and is formed as figure "8" so as to be supported by the temple, cheeks and the nasal septum of a user over the user's eyes. The sealing member 22 can be made of elastomer material such as rubber, silicone, urethane or polyvinyl chloride, or of a foam material. The sealing member 22 is held in place by a seal holder 24.

The rigid frame 16 can be curved to accommodate a user's face with the major viewing portion of the lenses 18 and 19 being in substantially the same horizontal plane to minimize any viewing distortion.

The eye cover 12 includes a retainer assembly 26 comprising a first strap 28, a second strap 30, and a pair of strap retainers 32 pivotally attached to the eye cover frame 16, with the strap retainers 32 holding the straps 28 and 30. The straps 28 and 30 can be made of elastomeric material and can be provided with vertical indentations, which can be designed in a saw tooth configuration (not shown), and are provided with a clip (not shown) so that the length of the straps 28 and 30 can be adjusted to accommodate different size heads of users. The first strap 28 is positioned to loop around the back of the user's head and the second strap 30 is positioned to loop over the top of a user's head.

The orientation of the snorkel 14 is described herein with regard to a user's mouth, with "lower" and "proximate" portions being closer to the user's mouth compared to "distal" and "upper" portions which are further from the user's mouth.

The snorkel 14 comprises a mouthpiece 34, a mouthpiece holder 36, a generally flexible lower connector 38, a main snorkel body portion 40, a generally flexible upper connector 42, and an upper extension 44. The mouthpiece holder 36, the lower connector 38, the main body portion 40, upper connector 42, and the upper extension 44 are each generally

hollow and tubular, and in combination provide a water-tight breathing tube 45 which allows the user to breathe face down in the water.

The main snorkel body 40 is generally rigid in construction, i.e., is substantially stiff, and can be formed of materials such as synthetic thermoplastic. The main body 40 can have a recess 46 proximate to the nose of the user so as not to impinge upon a user's nose. The swimming design may be used with a nose clip to avoid water from entering the nose. The main body 40 is rigidly connected to the central portion 20 of the eyepiece frame 16 by a molded connector ultrasonic welding, or adhesive bonding.

The mouthpiece holder 36 is also substantially rigid in construction and includes a rearward projecting extension 48, on which the mouthpiece 34 can be removably or permanently positioned. The mouthpiece 34, which is of conventional shape, can be molded from silicone rubber or the like.

The mouthpiece holder 36 can include a unidirectional valve 50 of the diaphragm type, which is normally closed. The valve 50 serves to drain the snorkel when water becomes trapped therein during use.

Snorkel body 40, mouthpiece holder 36 and upper extension 44 are molded of a more rigid material whereas connectors 38 and 42 are molded of a more pliable material. The snorkel main body portion 40, the mouthpiece holder 36, the connectors 38 and 42 and the upper extension 44 can be molded of a synthetic thermoplastic material, and optionally can have mating body halves which are mirror images with respect to each other for assembly by a conventional adhesive or by ultrasonic welding. The halves can be formed with a parting line and can include a tongue and groove configuration so that the body halves can be assembled in an airtight manner.

The lower connector 38 provides an indexed adjustable slip joint between the mouthpiece holder 36 and the main body portion 40. It allows the mouthpiece holder 36 to slide up and down relative to the main body portion 40 to accommodate different size users. It also allows the mouthpiece holder 34 to rotate or twist away from a user's mouth to permit the

user to move it out of the way when the user's head is above the surface of the water to clear the snorkel or talk to another person. In the scuba version, this also allows the mouthpiece to be twisted away to allow the use of a regulator in diving activities. The lower connector 38 can be shaped so that it is biased away from the user's mouth so that a user, merely by opening his or her mouth, can have the mouthpiece 34 spring out of the mouth, thereby allowing release of the mouthpiece without use of a hand.

The lower connector 38 can be made of a flexible material, such as silicone, urethane, or rubber.

The rearwardly projecting extension 48 has two orifices, a lower elongated breathing orifice 52, and an upper smaller purge orifice 54, which is generally circular in cross-section. The entrance 56 to the breathing orifice 52 is more forward than the entrance 58 to the purge orifice 54, i.e., the breathing orifice entrance 56 is more distal from the mouth of the user than is the purge orifice entrance 58. The entrance 56 to the breathing orifice 52 is shaped so that it can be closed off by a user with the user's tongue which thereby acts as a valve.

The breathing orifice 52 is directly connected to the breathing tube 45 by which air enters the user's mouth. The smaller purge orifice 54 is connected to a purge tube 60 that is substantially smaller in diameter than the breathing tube 45, and which is contained within the breathing tube 45. The purge tube 58 forms a passage from the purge orifice 54 to the space 62 formed by the space around the user's eyes, the sealing member 22, and the lenses 18 and 19 via opening 63. In use of the purge tube 60, a user places his or her tongue in position to seal off the entrance 56 to the breathing orifice 52 without blocking the purge tube entrance 58, and then pressurizes the purge orifice 54 by blowing into it, and thereby purges the area 62 around the eyes of any water. Thus, purging can be effected without any use of the user's hands and without the user lifting his or her head above water.

The upper extension 44 of the snorkel 14 is connected to the main body portion 40 by the upper connector 42. The upper extension 44 extends above the water line in use, and it and the main body portion 40 are configured to provide a curvature so that the snorkel is

proximate to a user's head to reduce drag while swimming. The upper connector 42 provides an indexed slip joint with the upper extension 44 so that the upper extension 44 can move axially relative to the main body portion 40 to accommodate different sizes of users' heads with reduced hydrodynamic drag and sway.

The upper extension 44 can be made of a rigid material such as synthetic thermoplastic. The connectors 38 and 42 can be made of a relatively flexible material such as silicone, urethane, vinyl or rubber.

The lower surface 64 of the upper extension 44 proximal to the user's head can be provided with a recess 66 for receiving the second strap 30 for stabilizing the upper extension 44.

The upper end 68 of the upper extension 44 has an opening 70 to allow the entry of breathing air. Optionally, the extension 44 can have one or more baffles 72 to separate water that splashes into the upper tubular extension 44 with a flowout opening 74 at the base of the baffle 72 to allow water to flow out of the passage in the upper extension 44.

As shown in Fig. 7, optionally, main body portion 40 of the snorkel 14 includes a forwardly extending projection 76. The projection 76 is configured and positioned to be just below the water line when the user is swimming. This reduces drag on the swimmer when passing through the water by creating a balancing negative bow wave. Since hydrodynamic drag on a swimmer is related to the height of the bow wave created by the swimmer passing through the water, reduction of the bow wave height through the use of the submerged forward protrusion 76 lessens the overall drag on the swimmer.

A version of the invention particularly adapted to the use of scuba activities is shown in Figs. 8-11. In this version, there is a pivot connection 100 in the main body portion 40, i.e., the main body portion has a lower segment 102 and an upper segment 104 which are pivotally connected together at a pivot connection 100 to permit the lower segment 102 to swivel upwardly relative to the upper segment 104 which is rigidly attached to the frame 16. A first configuration for this structure is shown by solid lines in Fig. 8 and a second configuration is

shown by a phantom line 108 in Fig. 8. By rotating the lower portion 102 upwardly about the pivoting connection 100 from the first configuration shown by line 108 to the second configuration, the mouthpiece 34 is moved out of the way of the user, so that a scuba regulator can be used. The pivot connection 100 is above the location 109 where the main body 40 portion is rigidly connected to the eye cover 12.

As shown in Figs. 10 and 11, the pivot connection 106, also referred to as a swivel connection, comprises a generally cylindrical projecting element 112 projecting from the lower segment 102 that rotates within a conformally shaped cylindrical recess 114 in the upper section. Its disengagement is prevented by a retaining element 116 that can be bonded in place by an adhesive. An O-ring 118 or other type of sealing device is used to prevent water leakage.

In order to hold the lower segment 102 in its up position in the first configuration, the lower segment 102 has a pair of detents 132, each of which receives a mating projection 134 of the upper segment 104. So that the purge tube 60 can accommodate this twisting motion it can be provided with a swivel connection.

A device incorporating all of the features of the present invention has significant advantages. For example, the snorkel is close to the center of a user's face and thus does not block peripheral vision. It also stabilizes the mask or goggles. Because of the rigid attachment between the eyes in the central location of the snorkel, the frame of the goggles is supported. It is possible to have a purge tube for clearing goggles or a mask without use of the hands under water. It reduces hydrodynamic drag compared to when the snorkel is off to the side or only flexibly attached to the goggles. The rigid attachment of the snorkel to the goggles helps maintain the goggle lenses in the same plane in the majority of the viewing section, allowing for a clear non-distorted view.

The invention integrates swim goggles or mask with a breathing tube that has the ability to purge the snorkel or goggles/mask of leaked water separately and independently without the use of the hands during the swimming activity, without a pause in the strokes. The shape of

the breathing tube can be sculpted to provide a low drag device for the swimmer. The central location of the breathing tube permits other features to be incorporated into the shape of the breathing tube, such as means for directional control to balance an uneven stroke and the ability to develop more or less flotation from the breathing tube. With the rigid attachment of the breathing tube to the mask/goggle several different configurations for masks and/or goggles may be attached to a single breathing tube design and still access the benefits of the rigid attachment.

Although the present invention has been described in considerable detail with reference to certain preferred versions thereof, other versions are possible. For example, as shown in Fig. 8, the snorkel can be provided with a light source, such as light emitting diodes 144 mounted on a battery containing support 146 that is pivotally mounted to the upper extension 44. Therefore, the spirit and scope of the appended claims should not be limited to the description of the preferred versions contained herein.

All features disclosed in the specification, including the claims, abstracts, and drawings, and all the steps in any method or process disclosed, may be combined in any combination, except combinations where at least some of such features and/or steps are mutually exclusive. Each feature disclosed in the specification, including the claims, abstract, and drawings, can be replaced by alternative features serving the same, equivalent or similar purpose, unless expressly stated otherwise. Thus, unless expressly stated otherwise, each feature disclosed is one example only of a generic series of equivalent or similar features.

Any element in a claim that does not explicitly state "means" for performing a specified function or "step" for performing a specified function, should not be interpreted as a "means" for "step" clause as specified in 35 U.S.C. § 112.